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The 40th Anniversary of the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Revisits His Opposition to War.

Sacramento, CA—"As the nation prepares to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with tributes to his Civil Rights legacy and commitment to non-violence, citizens should remember Dr. King's opposition to war," said Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus.

On Thursday, April 3, the eve of the 40th anniversary, Senator Ridley-Thomas, also Chairman of the Senate Committee on Business, Professions and Economic Development, will present Senate Joint Resolution 19 on the floor of the Senate.

The Resolution states that the U.S. Department of Defense has "failed to oversee the ethical conduct of California-licensed health professionals related to torture. The Resolution further requests that all relevant California agencies notify California-licensed health professionals that those who participate in torture may one day be subject to prosecution.

On April 4, 1967, exactly one year to the day before his assassination in 1968, Dr. King, this nation's greatest disciple of non-violence, told an audience at Riverside Church that his "conscience (left him) no other choice" than to condemn the war in Vietnam. He called ending the war through non-violent means a "moral imperative."

Despite strong opposition from the Civil Rights and political establishments to his anti-war stance, Dr. King said the war was changing the nation's domestic priorities and siphoning off resources needed to address economic and educational inequities, and health disparities.

"Once again the U.S. is involved in an unpopular and costly war of ambiguous, immoral and evil practices; a war, which seems to have no crest to its rising iniquity," said Senator Ridley-Thomas.

"Total funding for the Iraq War hovers near half-a-trillion dollars, while domestic spending programs and funding for health, education, foster care, the elderly and the disabled sustain continuous cuts. California, often thought to be the wealthiest in the nation, has not been spared as we learn of the Governor's draconian budget cuts."

"Nowhere is the 'mutilated' conscience more evident than in the alarming issue of physicians involved in torture in the Iraq War," stated Senator Ridley-Thomas. "Reports from the *International Red Cross* and *The New England Journal of Medicine* provide overwhelming evidence that military physicians and psychologists have directly participated in the development and cover-up of torture and abuse of detainees in U.S. custody."

"Dr. King would have not remained silent on an issue of such moral importance, and nor will I," said Senator Ridley-Thomas. Dr. King repeatedly warned us that, "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it."

As professional licensure and codes of ethics are regulated by states, California has the obligation to notify members of laws concerning torture that may result in their prosecution. I held a hearing and accepted testimony on this issue on January 14, 2008 at the State Capitol. Representatives from the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatrist Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Friends Service Committee, and Physicians for Social Responsibility backed my Resolution.

The Resolution is co-sponsored by The American Friends Service Committee that initiated the "Californians to Stop the Torture Campaign," and the Program for Torture Victims. Other organizations including Amnesty International have condemned the involvement of physicians in the torture of prisoners. Closer to home, the California Medical Association also states that it "condemns any participation in, cooperation with or failure to report by physicians and other health professionals the mental or physical abuse, sexual degradation or torture of prisoners or detainees.

"Torture is much more than a political issue. It is an ethical, moral and spiritual issue that has not only become a shame, but it is an evil in our midst. In this period of international crisis, we must be ever reminded of what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., stated so emphatically, "An injustice anywhere is an injustice every where."

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